

RFK Jr. faces battles in quest to change America's food

Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s push to strip processed food out of school lunch and limit food dye marks a shift in how Trump is planning to regulate the nation's food.

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Robert F. Kennedy Jr. made a pledge last month on [Fox News](#): He would get processed food out of school lunches “immediately” if he is given a position in a second Trump administration.

The message shocked nutrition experts who remember how Donald Trump's first administration [fought against stricter school lunch standards](#). In 2017, Sonny Perdue — Trump's agriculture secretary — declared he would “make school meals great again,” and for the next four years, he and other Republicans waged an assault on Michelle Obama's efforts to design healthier school menus when she was first lady.

Kennedy's [expected role](#) in overseeing aspects of food policy in the new administration marks a significant shift in how Trump is planning to regulate the nation's food.

Some of the ideas Kennedy is pushing — such as stripping ultra-processed food from school cafeterias and cracking down on food dye — have found public support on the right and left. But the notion of putting Kennedy, founder of a prominent [anti-vaccine group](#), in a position to shape health policy [has alarmed](#) some federal health officials and public health experts as well as the food industry. They worry about his [stated desire](#) to fire nutritionists at the Food and Drug Administration; his promotion of products and medicines the agency has previously warned against, such as [raw milk and hydroxychloroquine](#); and his history of promoting [debunked claims](#) about vaccine safety.

“Here's a man who presents himself as an advocate for science but embraces the least scientific aspects of the medical system,” said Peter Lurie, president of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a nonprofit that warns about the drawbacks of [ultra-processed food](#) and food dye. He was also a former top FDA official in the Obama administration. Kennedy faults Democrats for failing to prioritize healthy food.

“The fact that Democratic sachems are debating whether their party should support public health as a political strategy rather than embracing it as a core value is testimony to how out of touch and morally bankrupt the party has become,” Kennedy told The Washington Post. “Healthy food and clean, uncorrupted government agencies ought not to be partisan issues.” On [social media](#) and talk shows, Kennedy repeatedly hammers the food industry, claiming it is [“mass poisoning”](#) the American public.

He has said Trump wants to “get the chemicals” out of food. Kennedy has also targeted McDonald’s fries and [falsely claimed](#) that Froot Loops in Canada have just two or three ingredients. He has argued against consuming seed oils, though [nutritionists push back](#) against scientifically questionable claims that such oils are toxic. And he wants to [bar food stamps](#) from being used to buy soda or processed foods.

Overhauling food policy generally takes years, and some experts say such campaign promises could run into the realities of governing. But in 2025, the Trump administration will be charged with writing the next iteration of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, a publication that provides recommendations every five years for what Americans should eat to promote health and is a cornerstone of federal nutrition policy. Those guidelines, experts say, could give Kennedy a built-in vehicle to attempt to put his stamp on the nation’s food policy.

If Kennedy does push for regulations — such as limiting access to ultra-processed foods and banning food dyes — that would be a significant change for an industry accustomed to viewing the Republican Party as an ally, said Martin Hahn, a partner at Hogan Lovells whose work on behalf of the food industry focuses on industry regulations. The Biden administration has been working on potential [labeling requirements for food packages](#) as well as a “healthy” label for certain types of food.

“If RFK implements his agenda, we would be looking at everything the Biden administration was doing and putting them on steroids,” Hahn said, arguing that Kennedy’s policies could lead to higher grocery prices.

Food industry lobbyists say science should undergird any changes Kennedy wants to make to food regulations.